

popular and highly visited parks in the North Carolina park system. During the early 1990s more than 400,000 people per year visited the Park, bringing many people into the scenic heart of Stokes County (Hanging Rock State Park General Management Plan 1994).

The arrival of rail service caused many of the smaller towns in the southern part of the county to develop markedly. The population figures for the county during the period 1850-1900 show a steady growth from 9,206 to 19,866. Most of this growth corresponds with the county boom period 1879-1890 (Phillips, 1989).

Like the rest of the country, Stokes County experienced great economic disturbance during the first half of the twentieth century. After World War I, a great inflationary period occurred and increased the price of goods and land. Many people contracted huge debts, based on the belief that the high prices would remain. Not surprisingly when the Great Depression occurred, Stokes County was hit very hard, and many land speculators and thrifty savers lost everything. Every bank in the county closed, and the county remained bankless for three years. Recovery continued to be slow during much of the 1940s and 1950s (Hunter 1963, Lefler and Newsome 1973).

Stokes County's population during the first half of the century slowed almost to a halt. During the period from 1900-1950 the county population grew by little more than 1,600 to a total of 21,520. This slow rate of growth was responsible for much of the rural charm and character of the county. Many of the historic buildings remain because there was little need for new buildings during this period.

In recent years Stokes County has experienced a significant rate of population growth, with much of this in King and along the Forsyth County border. While the county population grew by less than 4,000 people from 1900-1970, in the following decade the population expanded by over 9,000 to a 1980 total of 33,086. Most of this population was in King and Yadkin township, due largely to freeway access to Winston-Salem. King now holds a quarter to a third of the total county population. While much of Stokes County remains relatively unchanged from earlier years, the southwest section of the county has experienced a building boom that has replaced the rural scenes with housing and commercial developments. This unplanned development has drastically altered the face of this section of the county and brought extreme pressure on the areas natural, scenic and historical resources. The lack of county planning also endangers other natural aspects and regions of Stokes County by not providing foresight and protection of natural, scenic and historic resources. Many of these resources have generally unappreciated value to the community at large and need to be protected and preserved at a county level.